

AYYUBID JERUSALEM

THE HOLY CITY
IN CONTEXT

1187-1250

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Chapter 22

AYYUBID ARCHITECTURE IN CAIRO

Bernard O'Kane

The Ayyubids ruled in Cairo for less than a hundred years, a period which was characterised by internecine and Crusader warfare, plagues, famines, and not infrequent squandering of the public purse by rulers either dissolute or desperate to survive.¹ Within these constraints, the wonder is perhaps not that we have so few monuments surviving from the Ayyubid period, but that there are so many. Although the constant warfare was a huge drain on resources, it did bring at least one significant benefit to building operations—a ready supply of labour. Ibn Jubair noted that the citadel was being worked on by 'the foreign Rumi prisoners whose numbers were beyond computation. There was no cause for any but for them to labour on this construction. The sultan has constructions in progress in other places and on these too the foreigners are engaged so that those of the Muslims who might have been used in this public work are relieved of it all, no work of that nature falling on any of them.' The second major Ayyubid citadel at Cairo, that of al-Salih Najm al-Din on the island of Roda, was also the work of foreign prisoners, as was his *madrasa*.²

As usual, the surviving buildings are much fewer than those known from the sources. For instance, of the twenty-five *madrasas* known to have been built by the Ayyubids in the Cairo area (i.e. including Fustat), we have the remains of only two. None of the six mosques, three *zawiya*s, three *ribat*s, two hospitals and numerous commercial establishments, or the single *khanqah*, has survived. But the extant monuments do include two of Cairo's iconic buildings, the citadel and the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i, which, together with the *madrasa* of al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, became touchstones that encouraged embellishment and emulation or challenged subsequent patrons to surpass.

The number of *madrasas* shows clearly the importance of this institution to the Ayyubids. The waning of Fatimid caliphal power in the latter decades of their reign meant that several *madrasas* had already appeared in Alexandria before the coming of the Ayyubids. Saladin lost no time, even when only the *wazir* (vizier) of the Fatimids, in founding two *madrasas* in Fustat, one Shafi'i, the other Maliki, these being the two most populous *madhhab*s of the time.³ The proliferation of *madrasas* was formerly seen as a counterweight to previous Fatimid propaganda, but it has been suggested that the Ayyubids used it as a tool to a variety of ends. Christians had attained great prominence in government circles under the Fatimids, and the establishment of *madrasas* was one way in which the Muslim community could reassert itself in the face of a large and active Christian population.⁴ These *madrasas* were well, or even lavishly endowed,⁵ and the stipends from their *waqf*s were a way of rewarding '*ulama*', many of whom were imported into Egypt by the Ayyubids, and of ensuring their continued loyalty.⁶ The importance of the '*ulama*' to the Ayyubid polity was further underlined by their preferment for important governmental positions, rather than those trained within the *diwans*, as had been the case previously under the 'Abbasids and Fatimids.⁷

The Citadel (pl. 22.1)

Even after Saladin had overthrown the Fatimids, his position in Egypt was precarious, not so much from Fatimid sympathisers as from Nur al-Din. In 1172 Saladin excused himself on the

³ Leiser 1985, 41.

⁴ Leiser 1985, 45–7.

⁵ Al-Khabushani, the director of Saladin's *madrasa* at the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i, had a salary of 40 *dinars* a month, about four times the normal. Leiser 1985, 42.

⁶ Chamberlain 1998, 232 and Leiser 1985, 42.

⁷ Rabbat 1997, 280.

¹ For an historical summary of the period, see Chamberlain, 'Crusader Era', and Raymond, *Cairo*, Chapter 3. The portion of Maqrizi's *Kitab al-Suluk* relative to the Ayyubids has been conveniently translated by Broadhurst 1980.

² Broadhurst 1980, 264.



Pl. 22.1 Cairo. The Citadel (12th-19th centuries AD).

grounds of Cairo's instability from Nur al-Din's request to join him in besieging Karak, knowing full well that the latter's suspicions would be aroused. The following year Saladin's brother, Turanshah, was dispatched to conquer Yemen; it was to be a fallback for Saladin and his family if Nur al-Din did decide to attack.⁸ As it turned out, just when Nur al-Din's preparations to invade Egypt were complete, he suddenly died. The citadel in Cairo was not begun until two years later, but the decision to build it was no doubt due to a combination of factors. Nur al-Din's repair of the major citadels of Aleppo, Damascus, Hims and Hama, including residential quarters at the first two, undoubtedly provided a model, and one that was followed by virtually all the Turkish or Kurdish rulers of the Jazira and Syria in his time.⁹ Defence was advisable against a number of quarters. These included the Crusaders, who had advanced very close to Cairo in 1169, Fatimid sympathisers (although they were probably the least of Saladin's worries), and, most importantly, given the near conflict with Nur al-Din, other ambitious family members or local rulers. In addition, there would have been a stigma to continued residence at the Fatimid palaces, or Dar al-Wizara.¹⁰ An imposing citadel and palatial residence sent a strong message of a new order of increased power to the surrounding population. The message is made clear on the foundation inscription of Saladin, which notes that it combines utility, beauty and comfort, but in the context of the Victory Sura which opens the inscription, and the phrase 'Reviver of the Dominion of the Commander of

the Faithful', which is appended to Saladin's name.¹¹ What is surprising is the location and size of this inscription: high up on the wall, on a plaque only 1.25m wide. True, it would have been visible to everyone as they passed the main gate, but given its dense and, it must be said, pedestrian script, reading it from the ground would have presented great difficulty, as it does today.¹²

The Citadel gave Cairo its first bent entrances, a military improvement from the earlier Fatimid gates. But the lack of archeological excavations within the Citadel, and its continuous habitation, mean that we have little knowledge of the Ayyubid buildings that were within the Citadel.¹³ Arguably of more importance was the effect on the urban growth of the city, which now stopped expanding towards the north; the Citadel drew buildings towards it from the southern end of the Fatimid city, and also due west towards the canal. The crossroads (*saliba*) of this with the *qasaba*, the main artery continuing south

¹¹ *Muhyi daulat amir al-mu'minin*. Rabbat 1995, 71. Saladin had used this title earlier, in 576/1180-1, in an inscription relating to a gate and attached wall: van Berchem, *MCLA, Le Caire*, 727. A foundation inscription of Saladin dated to 573/1177-8 on the Bab al-Barqiyya, newly revealed in 2003 (unpublished), also carries the title.

¹² Slightly later Ayyubid inscriptions on citadels, such as that at the Lion Gate of the Aleppo citadel (al-Malik al-Zahir, 606/1209-10), were much larger and closer to the ground. See Allen 2003 (<http://www.sonic.net/~tallen/palmtree/ayyarch/images/acit6.jpg>). Allen also noticed that the serpent gate has traces of an effaced original inscription, presumably also of al-Malik al-Zahir (<http://www.sonic.net/~tallen/palmtree/ayyarch/images/acit14.jpg>).

¹³ The most celebrated Ayyubid structure within the Citadel is probably Joseph's Well, an extremely impressive technical achievement. For the textual evidence for the internal Ayyubid structures, which included a Dar al-Adl, see Rabbat 1995, 78-80 and 85-6.

⁸ Broadhurst 1980, 46-7.

⁹ Bacharach 1991, 123-5; Rabbat 1995, 16-7.

¹⁰ Raymond 2001, 83.

towards Fustat from Bab Zuwaila, thus became another prime architectural locus.

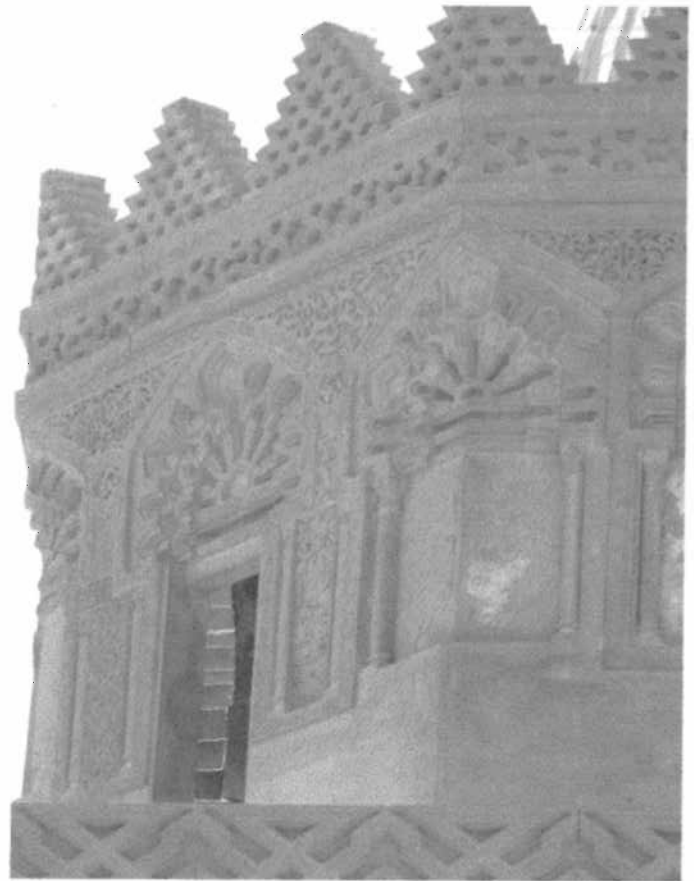
The Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i

Saladin's successor al-Adil, like his brother before him, spent most of his time campaigning in Syria. Apart from continued work on the fortifications of the city, al-Adil's only known foundation in Cairo was a small *madrasa* at Fustat. It is therefore not surprising that it was his son al-Kamil, governor of Cairo in al-Adil's absence, who erected the most memorable building of al-Adil's reign. Why should al-Kamil have decided to lavish his attention on Imam al-Shafi'i's mausoleum? Several reasons can be adduced. Saladin had already enhanced the area by erecting a *madrasa* at the site, about which Ibn Jubair had the following to say:

Over against it [the tomb of al-Shafi'i] was built a school the like of which has not been made in this country, there being nothing more spacious or more finely built. He who walks around it will conceive it to be itself a separate town. Beside it is a bath and other conveniences, and building continues to this day.¹⁴

Ibn Jubair also says of the mausoleum itself that it was 'a shrine superb in beauty and size'. This probably indicates that the tomb was rebuilt, or at the least renovated, by Saladin, and incorporated into the plan of his *madrasa* at the site. Certainly, the asymmetrical entrances into al-Kamil's buildings can be best explained by passages leading to the *madrasa* which we know was on the site now occupied by the adjacent 19th-century mosque. Saladin's foundation may have been designed to call to mind the *madrasa* tomb complex of Syria and to supplant the *ziyara* to the mausoleums of the 'Alids which the Fatimids had cultivated so assiduously.

When Saladin's son al-Aziz died suddenly after a fall from a horse in 1198, he was buried beside the tomb of al-Shafi'i. The pilgrimage guides that abounded for the cemetery stressed the holiness of the gravesites and the efficacy with which prayers were answered there. Al-Kamil buried his mother at the site. He himself was first interred in Damascus immediately after he died there; but the reinterment of his body within the tomb of al-Shafi'i was presumably the result of his previously expressed wish, suggesting that he was acutely aware of the *baraka* to be accrued from burial in the vicinity of the saintly champion of religious orthodoxy. Indeed, many graves that were previously at the site had to be moved to make way for the new construction.¹⁵



Pl. 22.2 Cairo. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i (608/1211). Detail of exterior.

His erection of a spacious mausoleum also made pilgrimage to the site easier, and correspondingly increased the possibilities for *baraka*, as pilgrims would be more inclined to pray for a patron whose family cenotaphs were conspicuous within its walls.¹⁶

At the time of its erection the domed mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i was one of the biggest in the Islamic world.¹⁷ Its diameter of 15m was equalled in the contemporary Islamic world by the *qibla* dome chamber of the Isfahan Friday Mosque, and surpassed only by the tomb of Sultan Sanjar at Marv (17.28m) and the Dome of the Rock (20.4m). Of course, its wooden dome is less of a technical achievement than the masonry examples, but it bears equal witness to the desire for its donor's munificence to be as conspicuous as possible. Such was the unprecedented size of the dome that the designer took no chances by making the lower walls extremely massive (2.75m thick), much more than was actually needed. We do not know for certain whether the present dome reflects that of the original, since Qa'itbay made major repairs to the zone

¹⁴ Broadhurst (Ibn Jubair) 1952, 40.

¹⁵ Taylor 1999, 42.

¹⁶ Various fragments from wooden cenotaphs now in the Islamic Museum of Cairo suggest that the interior might have had a much more cluttered appearance than it does now. See Weill 1931, 1-2, 32-40.

¹⁷ The most thorough account of the building is still Creswell 1952-9 Vol. 2:64-76.



Pl. 22.3 Cairo. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i (608/1211). Detail of cenotaph of Imam al-Shafi'i (574/1178-9).

of transition, and therefore probably replaced the dome at the same time.¹⁸

The siting of the adjacent *madrasa* explains the asymmetrical entrances to the building. The one on the side opposite the *qibla* is the largest, although it is off-centre. It is aligned with the cenotaph of al-Shafi'i; presumably this was the axis of the mausoleum at the time of Saladin, and in the rebuilding of the mausoleum by al-Kamil its area was expanded to the west, which was the location of the cenotaphs of the patron and his mother.

Despite the lack of a major entrance, the exterior is still commanding. One advantage of the extreme thickness of the walls was that it permitted successive setbacks that successfully lighten and disguise the zone of transition. The slim bevel of the lower square is echoed in that of the larger one in the intermediate zone; the frieze of stylized shells that surrounds the latter has an added refinement on one of these bevels, consisting of loops in the surrounding vegetal frieze¹⁹ (pl. 22.2).

It is at the top of the lower square and on this zone of transition that we have an early example in Cairo of stucco

which is—or reflects—the work of Maghribi craftsmen. The vertical panels that interrupt the geometric frieze which crowns the lower story have either dense geometric or arabesque ornament. Some of the latter includes Kufic in which the uprights are extended to form an interlacing frame in the form of a polylobed arch, a scheme that is similar to the decoration of many of the Almohad gates of Morocco.²⁰ Another Maghribi trait, that of mirror-writing, can be seen for the first time in Cairene epigraphy on one the spandrels of the north corner²¹ (pl. 22.2).

The interior of the mausoleum has been much restored. The question of whether the zone of transition reflects the original is a controversial one.²² Creswell noted

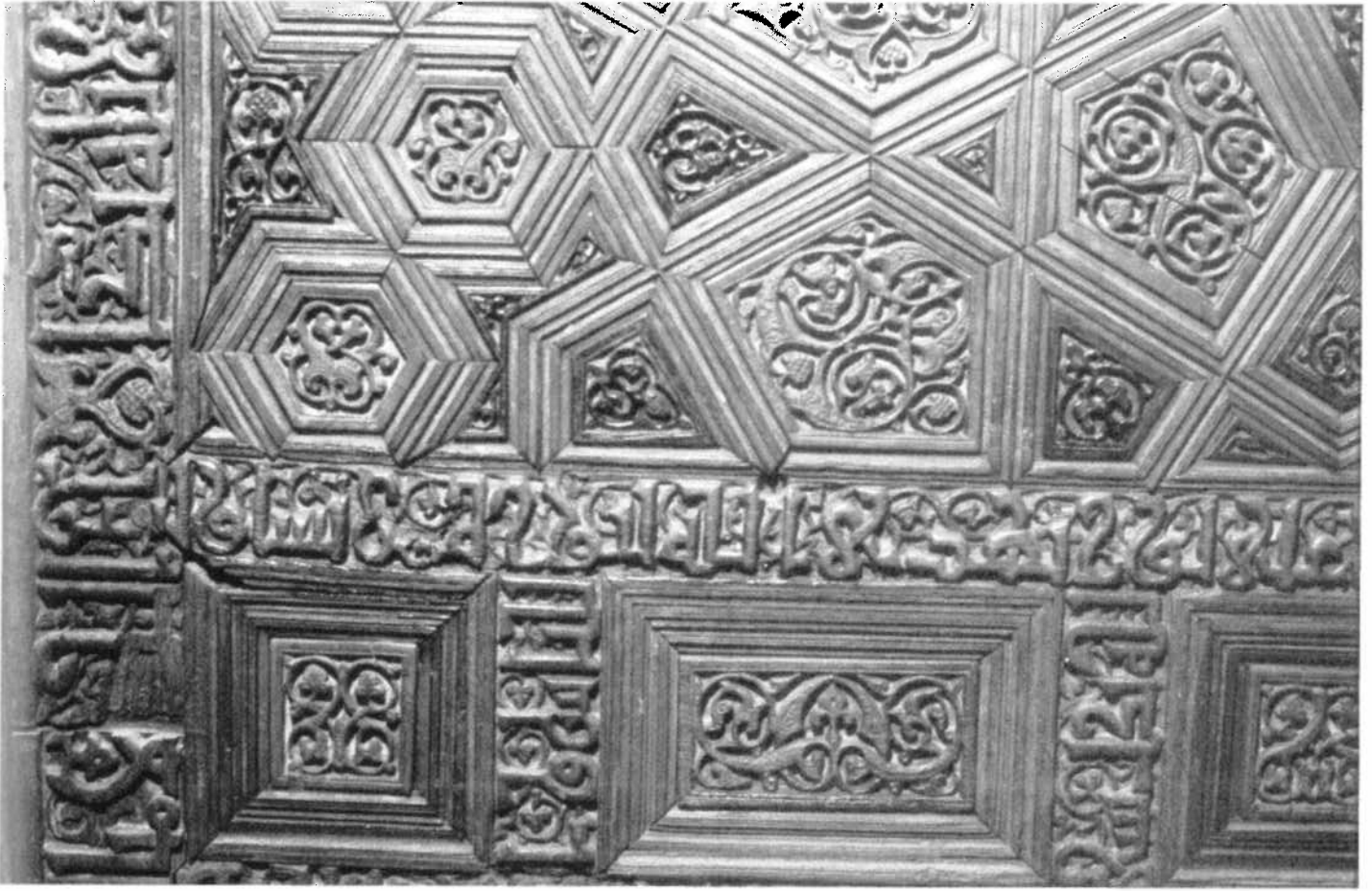
²⁰ The comparable decoration of the Wadayya gate is not stucco (*pace* Creswell 1952-9 Vol. 2, 75) but stone. For the most comprehensive readings of the epigraphy of the Wadayya gate at Rabat see now Ali 2001. The closest Maghribi stucco decoration is that of the Almoravids at the Qarawiyyin mosque at Fez (Terrasse 1968, pls. 42-3), work that was so ornate that it was considered offensive to the ascetic tastes of the new dynasty and which was covered up by them. The virtuoso talents of the stucco workers trained under the Almoravids must have been frustrated by the lack of opportunities to show what they were capable of, and their descendants must have relished the opportunity to be given free rein to their skills.

²¹ Creswell 1950-9 Vol. 2, pl. 23a.

²² Creswell 1950-9 Vol. 2, 70.

¹⁸ In another major repair in by 'Ali Bey al-Kabir in 1772 the outer lead sheeting and the inner shell were replaced; Creswell 1952-9, 73.

¹⁹ Creswell 1952-9 Vol. 2, pl. 23a.



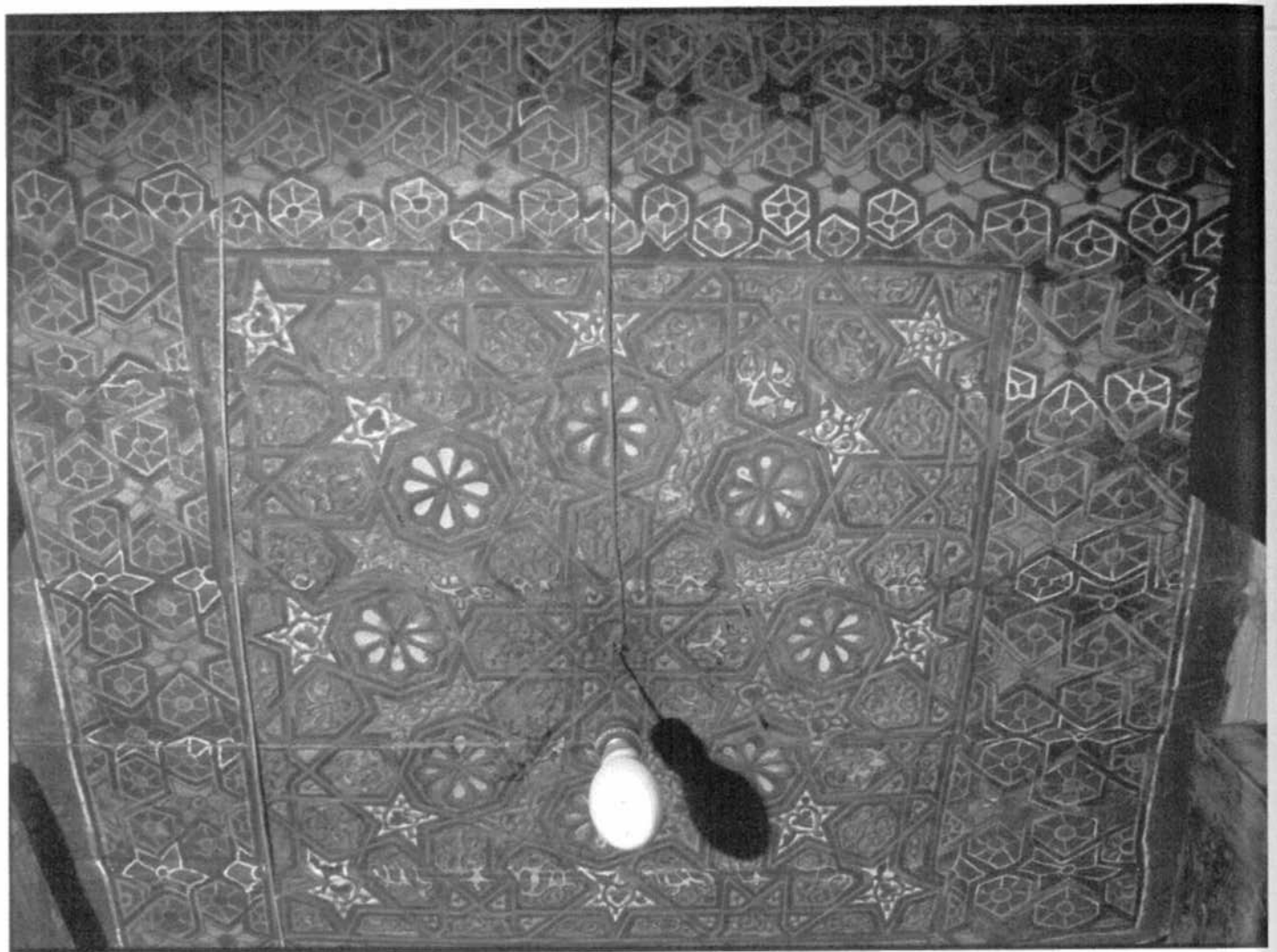
Pl. 22.4 Cairo. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i (608/1211). Detail of cenotaph of Imam al-Shafi'i (574/1178-79).

that the splayed *muqarnas* of the top tier has no parallel until the late 13th century, and that an exact match is found only in a mid 15th-century building (the Qadi Yahya mosque at Habbaniyya), causing him to attribute them to Qa'itbay's restoration of 1480. Against this, Behrens-Abouseif has noted that the profile of the dome resembles that of the mausoleum of al-Salih Najm al-Din, and that such a zone of transition would be very archaic for the Qa'itbay period. A wooden zone of transition of unprecedented size may indeed, as Behrens-Abouseif suggests, have necessitated unprecedented solutions, but part of the problem is that the comparative material in both the Ayyubid and Qa'itbay periods are largely masonry domes. The dome of the Qadi Yahya mosque which Creswell noted to be an exact match is indeed virtually identical, even to the detail of the unusual faceting of the single unit of *muqarnas* in the centre of the upper tier.²³ Just as important, it is of the same material—wood. Even if it would have been archaic for the Qa'itbay period, it may have been thought that a wooden model, even from some thirty years previously, may have provided the best model for the restoration. The alternative, that the architect of the Qadi Yahya dome suddenly reverted to a model over two centuries older, is less likely.

The *qibla* wall has three *mihrabs*, a scheme frequently found in late Fatimid mausoleums. Its re-use here shows that no sectarian meaning can be attributed to it. They are now decorated with inlaid marble in a scheme probably dating from the restorations of Qa'itbay; the original Ayyubid decoration is unknown.

The main material of Ayyubid interest in the interior is the variety of woodwork (pls 22.3–22.7). Of primary importance is the wooden cenotaph, dated to 574/1178–9, which Saladin donated at the time of the founding of the adjacent *madrasa*. This uses cursive script for the first time in Cairo, in the pyramidal upper section (pl. 22.3), although Kufic is found on the more extensive inscriptions on each of the lower rectangular sides (pls 22.3–22.4). The carpenter, 'Ubaid, known as Ibn al-Ma'ali, composed and crafted the cursive inscription that surrounds the top of the cenotaph, although it is otherwise inconspicuous, being barely one third of the height of the Qur'anic inscriptions below it. Well might he celebrate his virtuosity: this is one of the finest examples of medieval woodcarving to have survived. The geometric basis of the pattern is hexagonal, but with slightly different approaches on each of the upper, lower, wider and short panels. For the lower cube the long sides have five six-pointed stars, each surrounded by a hexagon with one elongated side; on the narrow sides

²³ Creswell 1950–9 Vol. 2, fig. 32.



Pl. 22.5 Cairo. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i (608/1211). Ceiling of east doorway.

the single five-pointed star at the centre of the composition is surrounded by smaller regular hexagons.

The upper pyramid is more complex, with a twelve-sided star in the centre within which is an off-axis six-pointed star; the arms of the latter are decorated with a continuous pearl band. The arabesque decoration is where the skill of the carpenter can be most appreciated. At first it appears to be symmetrical, but more careful examination reveals differences within every polygon (pl. 22.4). It is surprising that the motif of the grape still appears frequently, and even occasionally pairs of cornucopiae, motifs that had previous enjoyed a brief renaissance in late Fatimid woodcarving.²⁴

The cenotaph of the cenotaph²⁵ shows further developments. The central star is again a twelve-sided one, but

the pentagons that surround it are of unequal size as they are connected to the eight-pointed stars that flank it. The apparent intersection of star patterns was seen earlier on the portable *mihrab* of Sayyida Ruqayya, but there the pattern was simpler as all the stars were six-sided, framed by hexagons of equal size.²⁶ The carving has now also undergone development, the framing bands of the polygons displaying a continuous vegetal scroll in very light relief.²⁷ The carving within the polygons is even more delicate, with thinner stems and more background space visible. Only a fragment remains of what must have been a magnificent openwork Kufic inscription which ran around the four sides.²⁸

The main entrance from the exterior seems to have been the one opposite the cenotaph of Imam al-Shafi'i in the north wall. It has a ceiling of coffered octagons, the inner ones

²⁴ Whether this suggests that the craftsman, probably a member of the Syrian family of carpenters responsible for the *mihrab* (1167-8) of the Maqam Ibrahim at Aleppo (Ma'ali b. Salam) and the *mihrab* (1168-9) for the Aqsa mosque, had spent time in Egypt, or whether one should attribute the late Fatimid pieces to Syrian craftsmen, remains to be investigated.

²⁵ Her name is not known, probably because she was of servile origin.

²⁶ Weill 1931, pl. 16.

²⁷ Although a late-Fatimid parallel can also be found for this in the portable *mihrab* of Sayyida Nafisa (Weill 1931, p. 14).

²⁸ Cf. that of a wooden lunette from the Sayyida Nafisa, which has also been attributed to the Ayyubid period (Weill 1931, pl. 26).



Pl. 22.6 Cairo. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i (608/1211). Arabesque frieze.

with eight-pointed stars enclosing a lobed rosette. This is at the beginning of a series in Cairo that stretches well into the 14th century.²⁹ The smaller entrance in the east wall has another decorated wooden ceiling; at its centre is an eight-pointed star from which radiate lobed rosettes (pl. 22.5).

Running all around the dome chamber, including even the entry and the *mihrabs*, is a band of arabesques (pl. 22.6). It was difficult to appreciate the complexity of this design until it was cleaned and repainted some years ago. Like the stucco on which it may have been based, it is in deep relief. Another frieze (pl. 22.7), this time consisting of a Kufic inscription encircles the four walls of the dome chamber at the height of brackets which once supported the lighting system, and even runs along the sides and front of the brackets. These brackets are therefore original, and are another early surviving example of a feature that was to become standard in large Mamluk dome chambers.

The Funerary Enclosure of Abu Mansur Isma'il (613/1216)

The portal and *ivan* in the cemetery, some way to the south of the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i, known as the mausoleum of *amir* Abu Mansur Isma'il, is a structure whose function is controversial. It consists of a stone portal with a corridor behind, and an *ivan* (the earliest surviving in Cairo) 21m away. The portal is of interest on account of its outstanding decoration (pl. 22.8), consisting of a frieze of square billets above a *naskhi* inscription on a floral ground. The billets, the central two of which have *al-mulk li'llah* in a delicate Kufic while the others contain arabesque and geometric decoration,³⁰ are at first sight symmetrically arranged, but a closer inspection shows subtle changes between each pair. The Qur'anic inscription below is

²⁹ Creswell 1950-9 Vol. 2, 68.

³⁰ The arabesques are recessed, the geometric billets raised.



Pl. 22.7 Cairo. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i (608/1211). Kufic frieze.



Pl. 22.8 Cairo. Funerary enclosure of Abu Mansur Isma'il (613/1216). Detail of portal.

equally a masterpiece of carving, with letters of rounded profile upon an unusually crisp vegetal scroll that recalls the cenotaph of the mother of al-Kamil. Such a detailed background was never again attempted in Cairene stone-carved epigraphy.

The inscription identifies the building as a mausoleum (*turba*); although now in its rightful place within the portal to the monument, it had been earlier moved to the cenotaph within the *ivan*. Van Berchem had earlier noted that its measurements indicated that it had originally been over the portal, an argument accepted by Creswell. But Creswell added

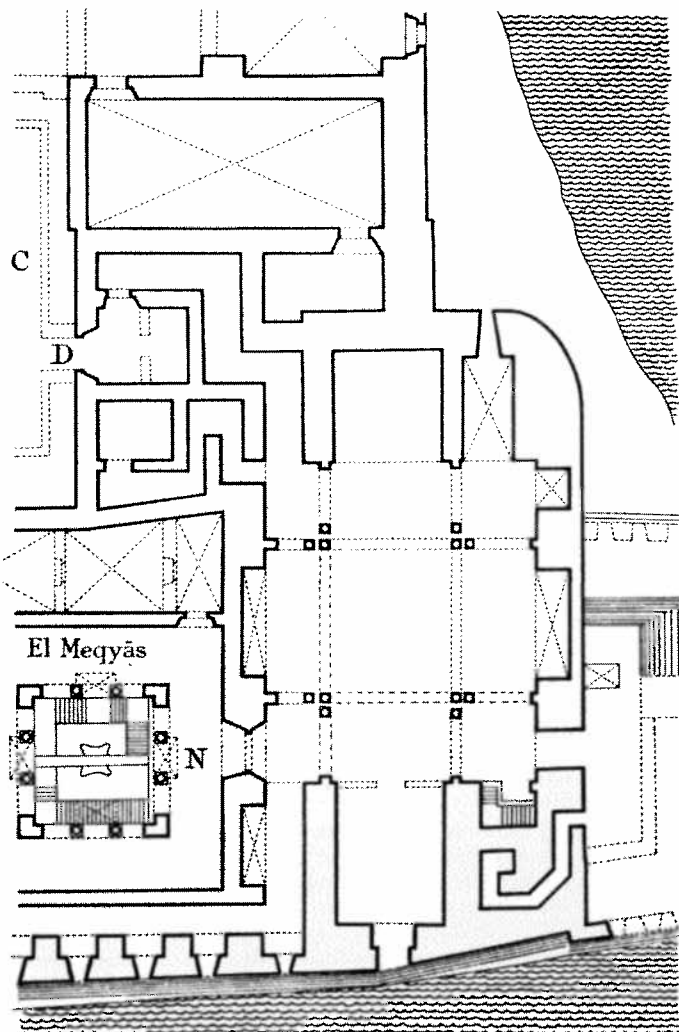


Fig. 22.1 Cairo. Roda Island, Citadel, plan (after Creswell).

‘the fact that the slab has been moved deprives it of any evidence that the building in which it now rests [ie. the *ivan*] was ever now connected with the portal.’³¹ It must be admitted that the portal is some way from the *ivan*, is not quite in exact alignment with it, and has an internal doorway that led to the north as well as to the south, making the reconstruction of a burial courtyard with an *ivan* problematical.³²

Yet Creswell accepted that the style of the *ivan* is of the same period as the portal, and in fact himself surmised that portal and *ivan* were part of a complex that included a two-*ivan* *madrasa* with a domed mausoleum of the founder to the right of the portal.³³ But Abu Mansur Isma‘il had already founded a *madrasa* within Cairo, the Shafi‘i Madrasa of al-Sharifiyya.³⁴

³¹ Creswell 1950-9 Vol. 2, 79.

³² This will remain so unless it ever becomes possible to reconstruct the plan through excavation.

³³ Creswell 1950-9 Vol. 2, 80.

³⁴ Maqrizi, *Khitat* Vol. 2, 373.

Even though a wealthy *wazir*—he was the supervisor of the *hajj* pilgrimage—there is no known instance of a non-royal Ayyubid patron building more than one *madrasa* in Cairo. And had the complex consisted of a *madrasa* and tomb, then, as is the case with all the known foundation inscriptions on complexes in Cairo which include both functions, a common doorway would most likely have mentioned the foundation of the *madrasa* only, as it was the institution most likely to draw merit, and least likely to raise objections.³⁵ Creswell noted that there is not a single instance in Egypt and Syria where an *ivan* is used as a mausoleum. While this is certainly a strong point, it ignores examples from a region not far beyond—Anatolia—where the *ivan* tomb is also a rarity, but where four 13th-century examples exist.³⁶ The earliest, at Seyidgazi, is ascribed to the mother of ‘Ala’ al-Din Kaiqubad, and therefore possibly contemporary with the *ivan* of Abu Mansur Isma‘il. Perhaps we should regard *ivan* tombs as an experiment that never really caught on, as evidenced by this and the few that are known from Anatolia and slightly later in Iran.³⁷ It is probably best to view this ensemble as a fashion that similarly failed to take hold, but which, as the foundation attests, should be seen as a funerary enclosure.

The Citadel on Roda Island

Despite its destruction, we have sufficient information from the sources to understand the extravagance of this construction. Why was it needed? On purely military grounds, it could hardly have rivalled the Qal‘at al-Jabal (as the Citadel of Saladin was called). Several reasons have been suggested: al-Salih’s mistrust of the troops stationed in the Citadel and, the corollary, a need to feel safe in a base manned by his own *mamluks*;³⁸ a necessity to isolate these same *mamluks* from the resentment they stirred up in the army;³⁹ a desire for a defensive and palatial complex in a suburban setting near to water; and the yearning for a legacy as the founder of a new centre of administration.⁴⁰

³⁵ All the inscriptions in medieval Cairo that use the word *turba* are found on mausolea, frequently within complexes; the one that appears on an entrance to a complex, the mosque and tomb of Ahmad al-Mihmandar (dated 1325), begins: *amr bi-bina hadhi’l-turba wa’l-masjid al-mubarak*, i.e. mentioning both functions of the complex.

³⁶ Aslanapa 1971, 146.

³⁷ A 14th-century example is the *ivan* at Garladan, near Isfahan: see Wilber 1955, cat. no. 56; for 15th-century examples at Marv, see Golombek and Wilber 1988, cat. no. 98.

³⁸ Creswell 1950-9 Vol. 2, pls 39a, c; for the Jerusalem examples see in Auld and Hillenbrand 2000, 21.

³⁹ Rabbat 1995, 86, although given al-Salih’s iron grip on the reins of power one wonders whether he could not have achieved the same end by a reorganisation within the earlier citadel.

⁴⁰ Rabbat 1995, 86.

⁴¹ MacKenzie 1992, 76.

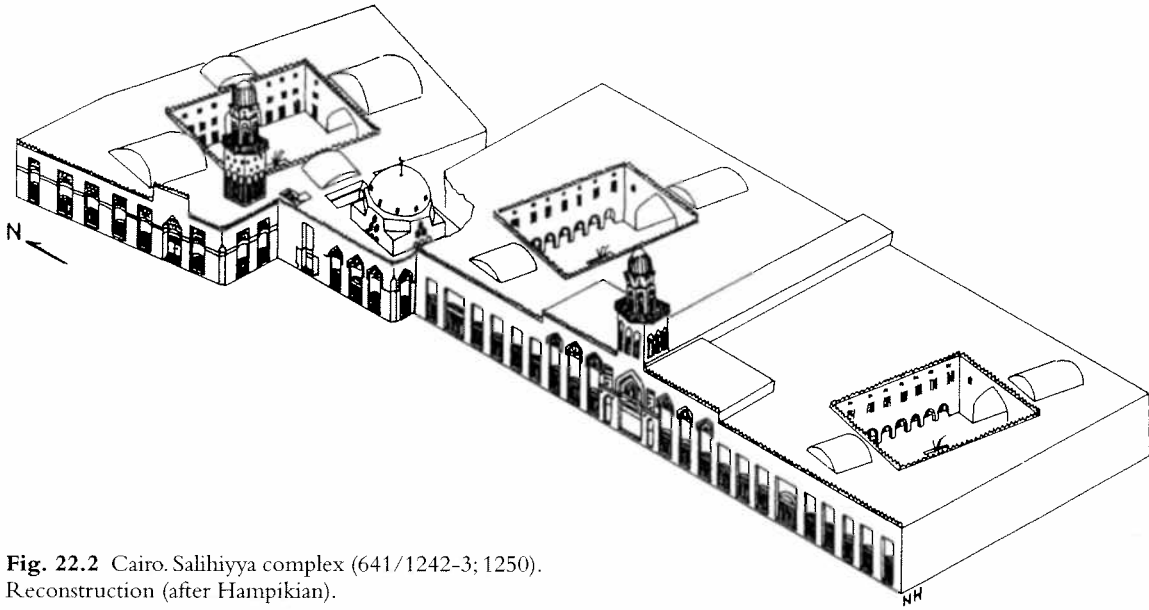


Fig. 22.2 Cairo. Salahiyya complex (641/1242–3; 1250). Reconstruction (after Hampikian).

According to Maqrizi, al-Salih was passionately addicted to polo playing,⁴¹ and the huge space sequestered for the Roda citadel would certainly have allowed for this. It even had space for a game park,⁴² another pastime eminently suitable for the outstanding horsemanship that being an avid polo player requires.

Thanks to the drawing and description of the part of the palace in the *Description de l'Egypte* we have the plan of a *qa'a* (reception hall) from the palace.⁴³ It consisted of two vaulted *iwans* facing each other and a dome in the centre which, to judge from its oblong base and flimsy supports of groups of three columns, must have been wooden (fig. 22.1). The vaulting of the *qa'a* relates it to the only other vaulted example in Cairo, the Qa'at al-Dardir, which may also be Ayyubid.⁴⁴ Some idea of the vanished splendour of the rooms of the citadel may be gained from the four enormous columns that form the main support within the mausoleum of Qala'un, which came from the Roda citadel.

As mentioned above, one reason for the affordability of al-Salih's constructions was the availability of Crusader

prisoners to work on them.⁴⁵ A rare example of their involvement in the style of architecture on which they worked is seen in a doorway from the courtyard that leads to the *qa'a* mentioned above; the slim engaged colonettes and capitals of the portal are thoroughly Gothic.⁴⁶

The Salahiyya (641/1242–43) (pl. 22.9)

After Saladin's coup, his troops and *amirs* were quartered within the old Fatimid palaces. Only seventy years later was this arrangement transformed, when a large portion of the eastern palace was demolished to make way for al-Salih's *madrasa* (1242–3). This had an unusual plan, consisting of two parallel courtyards, each with two *iwans*, each *iwan* being assigned to one of the four legal *madhhabs*. Earlier in 1225, not far away, al-Salih's father, al-Kamil, had constructed a *madrasa* for teaching *hadith* with a single two-*iwan* courtyard.⁴⁷

Creswell used this *madrasa* as the starting point for an excursus on the origins of the cruciform plan of Cairene *madrasas*, insisting on their primacy. Yet, as Hillenbrand has pointed out, the earliest examples are Anatolian Saljuq ones

⁴¹ Broadhurst (Maqrizi) 1980, 296. MacKenzie (1992, 76) notes in this context al-Salih's revitalization of the Qaramaidan, and the polo grounds at Bab al-Luq.

⁴² 'Part of this area was enclosed by a fence, which preserved the sultan's wild game,' Ibn Sa'id, *apud* MacKenzie 1992, 74.

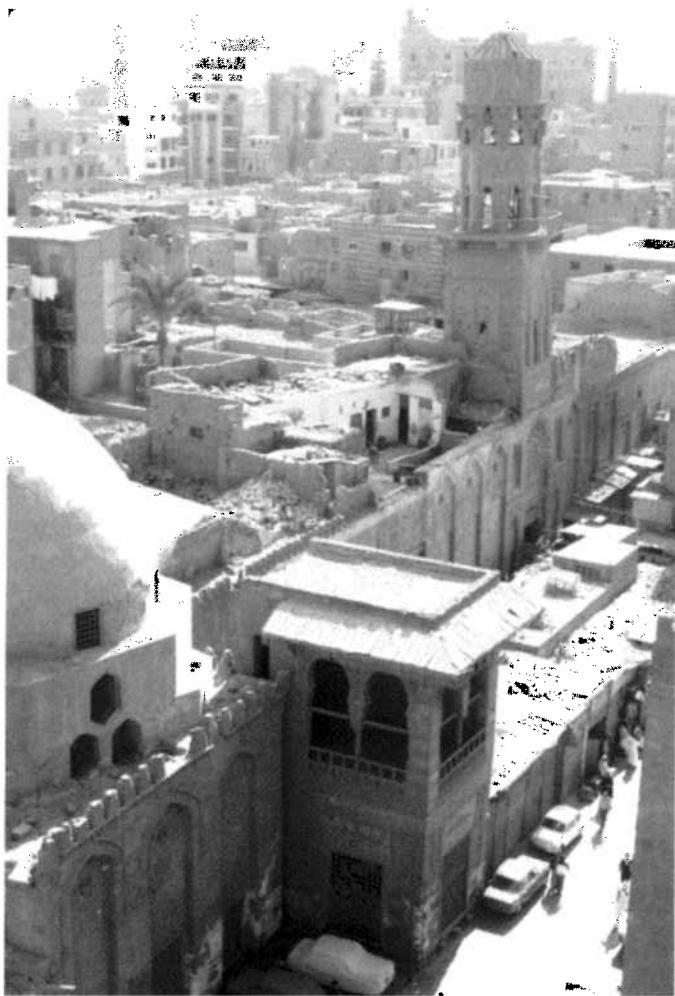
⁴³ Creswell 1950–9 Vol. 2, 86.

⁴⁴ O'Kane 2000, 152–3. The documents from this period show that the design of *qas* at the time was in a state of flux, with the most frequently occurring types being the single-*majlis*, *majlis-iwan* and single-*iwan qas*. Sayed 1987.

⁴⁵ See n. 1 above.

⁴⁶ Creswell 1950–9 Vol. 2, 87. The only other example in Cairo is in the curlicue window grilles of the Qala'un complex; *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pl. 66c.

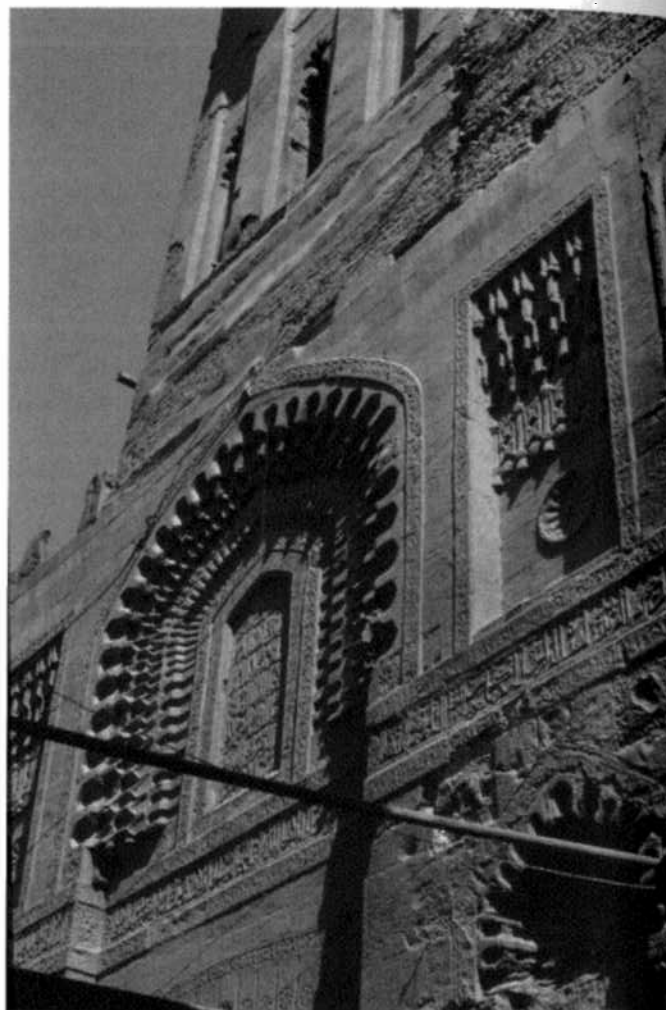
⁴⁷ Creswell 1950–9 Vol. 2, 80–3. The monument is currently under restoration; preliminary soundings seem to indicate that the monument did have student cells on its northern side. This arrangement was doubted by Creswell on account of a Mamluk *amir's* bath of 1261 that replaced a house.



Pl. 22.9 Cairo. Salahiyya complex (641/1242-43). Overall view.

of which Creswell was ignorant, and these in turn were quite possibly dependent on now lost Iranian or, possibly, Syrian models.⁴⁸ We can similarly find in Anatolia a model for the plan of the Salahiyya. Even if it does not have a passageway between its two courtyards, the Çifte Madrasa at Kayseri (602/1205) is a close analogue.⁴⁹ But here too, it is possible that a now lost Iranian or Syrian example provided a model for both the Salahiyya and the Kayseri Çifte madrasas.⁵⁰

The façade is the most impressive element of the remaining madrasa (pls 22.9-22.10). Recent excavations within the mausoleum of al-Salih have revealed that 11.25m of the original façade were destroyed to make room for the dome chamber, so that the whole of the original façade would have



Pl. 22.10 Cairo. Salahiyya complex (641/1242-43). Entrance portal.

had a length of just over 100m.⁵¹ This is indeed an impressive figure, and given that each window (there were twelve to either side of the central bay) was carefully carved in a style different from its neighbour, and that the whole formed a carefully graduated crescendo towards the central portal, this was certainly one of the most impressive façades of its time in the Islamic world. The minaret that topped the central portal was not at all necessary in the context of the madrasa, but was both an appropriate visual climax to the sweep of niches on either side, and an attention grabber. No wonder the façade was aligned with the street rather than the qibla: the desirability of advertising one's patronage was not lost on al-Salih's successors who, since they could not match his buildings in width, competed with it in height instead. Al-Salih's munificence was also advertised by the inscriptions with his name and titles both in the band above the portal and within the arched panel above it (pl. 22.10). It was the first readily visible Ayyubid foundation inscription of their remaining buildings in Cairo.

⁴⁸ Hillenbrand 1994, 183-6.

⁴⁹ Aslanapa 1971, 130.

⁵⁰ Golvin's theory that its unusual disposition could have been the result of the transformation of a qra of the Fatimid palace which existed on the site has been rebutted by the discovery of the remains of the Fatimid palace during recent excavations beneath one of the courtyards. It can be seen that the palace followed the street, not the qibla orientation. O'Kane 2000.

⁵¹ Hampikian 1997, 59-60, fig. 49c.

The tomb that Shajar al-Durr built for her husband al-Salih after his sudden death was not envisaged in the original layout, as has sometimes been thought; it occupies part of the space of the former living quarters of the Malikite *shaikh* of the *madrasa*. It juts out six metres into the street, another attention-grabbing technique which was to be used by Baibars, Qala'un and al-Ghauri in their complexes on other parts of the same street. Prominent on the exterior are several examples of the seal of Solomon, a motif also present in Ottoman Jerusalem.⁵² The recent restorations uncovered the crypt, decorated with a fine painted plaster Qur'anic inscription running around its walls. Its interior has two notable features: a zone of transition that incorporates three tiers of *muqarnas*, instead of the two normal under the Fatimids; and a *mihrab* revetted with marble, common earlier in Syria, but the earliest surviving example in Cairo.⁵³ Cairo also lagged behind Syria in complexes like this which combined a mausoleum with another religious institution,⁵⁴ but Shajar al-Durr's model soon became the norm within Mamluk Cairo. The mausoleum also played a prominent role in Bahri Mamluk history, for it was a vital part of the inauguration ceremonies of every sultan.

Shajar al-Durr herself, possibly during the period of her regency, incorporated a mausoleum in her own complex near the mausoleum of Sayyida Ruqayya. It also included a *madrasa*, a palace, a bath and a garden. The *madrasa* seems to have had an *ivan* that faced outwards, possibly towards a garden, as in the case of the Firdaus Madrasa at Aleppo.⁵⁵ Her mausoleum is notable for the hood of its *mihrab*, which is decorated with a mosaic consisting of a *shajara 'l-durr* (tree of pearls)⁵⁶ (pl. 22.11).



Pl. 22.11 Cairo. Mausoleum of Shajar al-Durr (1250). Detail of *mihrab* hood.

Summary

Ayyubid architecture in Cairo has elements both of rupture and continuity. The style and forms of decoration for the most part continued Fatimid models. This is seen for instance in the stylized scallop shell which was employed on the tombs of Imam al-Shafi'i, al-Salih and Shajar al-Durr, and the Salihyya Madrasa, and in the geometric interlace of the balustrade of Imam al-Shafi'i, which follows those on the crowns of many Fatimid *mihrabs*. The same mausoleum also employs the triple *mihrab* which was commonplace in Fatimid examples. Although signed by a craftsman possibly of the same family as the Aleppan master of the *minbar* made for al-Aqsa Mosque, the carving and geometric design of the woodwork of the cenotaphs of Imam al-Shafi'i and the mother of al-Kamil developed naturally out of the portable *mihrabs* of Sayyida Nafisa and Sayyida Ruqayya.

The most obvious rupture is in the introduction of new building types such as the citadel, the *khanqah*, the *ribat* and the *zawiya*,⁵⁷ or in their great expansion, as was the case with the *madrasa*.⁵⁸ The *ivan* appeared, probably for the first time in Egypt,⁵⁹ and became an integral part of *madrasas* from this time onwards, its importance underscored by the first four-*ivan* *madrasa* in which one *ivan* was allotted to each of the four *madhabs*, a feature that was to become commonplace under the Mamluks.

The element of size was clearly of more importance to the Ayyubids than to the Fatimids. The Shafi'ite *madhhab* to

⁵² Creswell 1950–Vol. 2, pls 39a, c; for the Jerusalem examples see in Auld and Hillenbrand 2000, 21.

⁵³ Ibn Jubair describes the interior of the Mashhad al-Husain as follows: 'There too are various kinds of marble tessellated with coloured mosaics of rare and exquisite workmanship such as one cannot imagine nor come near to describing. The entrance to this garden [mausoleum] is by a mosque like to it in grace and elegance, with walls that are all marble in the style we have just described.' (tr.) Broadhurst 1952, 37. Saladin instituted a *madrasa* within this shrine (MacKenzie 1992, 112–3); the marble revêtement may have been carried out at the same time.

⁵⁴ Hillenbrand 1994, 190–1.

⁵⁵ Behrens-Abouseif 1983.

⁵⁶ One building that has not been discussed here is the mausoleum of the Abbasid caliph (Creswell 1950–9 Vol. 2, 88–94). Those reading this volume will be familiar with the concept of inhumation and re-interment, since Jerusalem was so often a favoured destination for this practice. There is a possibility that the body of the caliph Abu Nadla (d. 1242) was moved there after his death. The mausoleum contains the cenotaphs of two sons of the Mamluk sultan Baibars, and one can surmise that Baibars may have built it as a family mausoleum even if he was eventually buried in Damascus (a view first put forward in Ibrahim 1978, 82 n. 23). Baibars had a burial enclosure within the *qanifa al-sughra* (Behrens-Abouseif 2000, 57; I am grateful to the author for this reference), i.e. in this vicinity, although its exact location had not been pinpointed—could this be it?

⁵⁷ On the latter three categories see MacKenzie 1992, 140–2.

⁵⁸ The two hospitals of Saladin at Cairo and Fustat should also be mentioned here; they were extravagantly praised by Ibn Jubair (tr.) Broadhurst 1952, 33–4. They were not strictly a new institution, since Ibn Tulun had built one earlier at Fustat, but his of course had long been moribund.

⁵⁹ A building known as the *ivan* was a major component of the Fatimid palace, but it is not known whether it was in the shape of the hall known to art historians, or whether it was a synonym for a palace; Grabar 'Iwān', *EF* Vol. IV, 287.

which they adhered did not permit building more than one Friday mosque in each town. The plethora of available mosques thus eliminated the option of building a new congregational one, so that the citadel, the tomb⁶⁰ and the *madrasa* became the beneficiaries of this new monumentality. The length (100m) of the decorated façade of the Sahiliyya, for instance, was made even more striking by orienting it with the street pattern rather than the *qibla*, reinforcing a dichotomy that would be characteristic of all subsequent intra-mural Cairene monuments.

The Ayyubids made a decisive administrative break with the past and, with al-Salih's reliance on *mamluks*, brought about the means of their own overthrow that was to determine the history of the city for many centuries. Their Citadel was an equally important force for change; by being at the same time the focus of administration, the military, and the ruler's residence, it initiated the urban settlement of the areas between Cairo and Fustat and altered forever the future growth of the city.

⁶⁰ Two 13th-century pilgrimage guides, which only exceptionally pointed out monuments to pilgrims, noted that the mausoleum of Yahya al-Shabihi was considered large (Rāḡib 1977, n. 93); how much more imposing then must the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i have been to all visitors, being visible from far off in every direction.